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S E C R E T ANKARA 000855

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PARM](#) [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [TU](#)

SUBJECT: TURKEY: AEGEAN ISSUES MUST BE ADDRESSED AS A  
PACKAGE, SEPARATE TALKS ON OVERFLIGHTS NOT IN OUR INTEREST

REF: A. STATE 61209

[1](#)B. ANKARA 840

[1](#)C. ATHENS 1015

[1](#)D. DAO ATHENS IIR 6 837 0304 09

Classified By: Ambassador James F. Jeffrey for reason 1.4 (b, d)

Summary

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[1](#)1. (S) The Ambassador raised Aegean issues with Turkish MFA Undersecretary Apakan on June 16, pressing hard that overflights of inhabited Greek islands did not support the goal of calm in the Aegean. Apakan was clearly taken aback by our approach on the overflights specifically, and said he could not understand why the U.S. would ask Turkey to undercut the direct, confidential discussions Turkey was conducting with Greece (which, however, he had not briefed us on in detail until this meeting). He also raised questions about the veracity of the Greek allegations that overflights of the two islands had increased significantly. He said Turkey supported actions which would calm tensions in the Aegean and supported our goal of preferring diplomacy and confidence-building measures over military action. Apakan said that Turkey sought to negotiate Aegean issues with Greece as a package, and pulling out one issue important to Greece -- at the behest of the U.S. -- would lessen significantly Turkey's leverage on Greece to negotiate other issues. Apakan reiterated Turkey's call for Greece to agree to negotiate a "code of conduct" for military air operations over the Aegean to prevent recurrence of deadly consequences of Greek intercepts of Turkish military aircraft. Separately, the First Air Force Commander told us that nothing has changed in recent months in Turkish flights in the Aegean. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (S) The Ambassador met with MFA Undersecretary Ertugrul Apakan on June 16 to discuss Aegean issues per ref a and to propose a way forward to work to reduce tension. Apakan was joined by a broad assembly of MFA experts covering bilateral Turkey - Greece issues, Maritime affairs and U.S. - Turkey affairs. Pol-Mil Couns accompanied Ambassador.

[1](#)3. (S) The Ambassador made all of ref a points, focusing on USG concerns about overflights of inhabited Greek islands and expressing hope that in light of PM Erdogan's upcoming trip to Athens (ref b), more progress could be made towards finding a way to reduce tensions in the Aegean. After taking a moment to consider the demarche, U/S Apakan asked to see the Ambassador one-on-one. Apakan told the Ambassador that Turkey sought to address Aegean issues directly with Greece in confidential talks. Turkey sought to use a comprehensive approach, similar to that proposed in our points, Apakan said, and sought to inventory and then address issues comprehensively. Apakan told the Ambassador that PM Erdogan hoped to advance this agenda during his upcoming visit to

Athens, expected to take place June 20 - 21. The Ambassador explained that, for the U.S., the issue of overflights of the two islands was different than the many other Aegean issues, since the U.S. was a party to the international document regarding their status, and could well have to make our views of the two islands' sovereignty known if an incident occurred. Apakan took on board our points, but asked that the Ambassador not/leave a copy of the points as a formal non-paper, and then called back to the meeting the rest of the participants.

14. (S) Apakan said that Turkey had been working with the Greeks at the Undersecretary level to improve relations, and had had forty-one meetings since the launch of this dialogue. Apakan insisted that Turkey does discuss the status of these islands, together with the other issues, in sidebars to those meetings. He suggested that Greece did not like the comprehensive approach and that Turkey would not agree to a single-issue approach in its discussions. All of the issues, including, among others, national airspace, territorial waters, continental shelf, status of geographical formations, demilitarized status of islands, the Flight Information Region must be discussed. Although there had not been concrete progress, Apakan continued, the more understanding and empathy between the parties, the more likely agreement would be. He expressed real satisfaction with the progress made, including Greek willingness to at least include all of these issues. (The Turks have long said that the Greeks traditionally argue that the only open bilateral Aegean issue is the continental shelf.)

15. (S) Apakan disputed Greek claims that the number of Turkish flights had increased. He asserted that the ratio of

Greek to Turkish sorties over the Aegean is ten to one. Apakan then raised an issue about which Turkey is still bitter: the trial and conviction in absentia earlier this year in Greece of a Turkish F-16 pilot who had been involved in a mock dogfight over the Aegean in May 2006 that had resulted in a crash and the death of the Greek pilot. Apakan said that while it was tragic that the Greek pilot had died, both the NATO and the Turkish investigation suggested that the Greek pilot was responsible for the crash. Greek interceptions of every Turkish flight over the Aegean were irresponsible, said Apakan, and Turkey had long proposed sitting down with the relevant Greek authorities to negotiate a "Code of Conduct" for aviation over the Aegean. Summing up, Apakan said that Turkey's message to Greece is: "We want to talk. We know the inherent risks. But this is not just a one-sided issue."

16. (S) Turkish MFA officials have consistently questioned whether overflights of Agathonisi and Farmakonisi have actually increased at all, let alone to the extent to which the Greeks claim they have. We generally dismiss these assertions, assuming instead that the Turkish General Staff may not be sharing this information with the MFA. But on June 16, on the margins of an international exercise, Lt Gen Bilgin Balanli, Commander of Turkey's First Air Force told ODC Turkey Chief Maj Gen Rosborg that there had been no change in overflights, implicitly rejecting Greece's claims. Balanli, who commands all of the Turkish fighter aircraft which would fly over the Aegean, has a strong reputation of being candid.

Comment  
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17. (S) We recognize that Greece looks to the U.S. for help in pressing Turkey to focus political attention on Aegean issues. We think there may be some merit to the argument put forward by FM Bakoyannis (ref c) that Turkish officials may look to use the overflights of Agathonisi and Farmakonisi to strengthen their bargaining position on other Aegean issues.

18. (S) In this regard, we note that the Greek CHOD mentioned to a USG official that Greece might have to, at some point, use force to prevent overflights of these islands (ref d).

We suggest/hope that this was intended simply to ensure USG and NATO involvement in this bilateral issue.

19. (S) We are faced with an interesting phenomenon. On the one hand the Turks and the Greeks (assuming the Turkish description above is accurate, Greeks having been more discreet) seem to be approaching this bilateral agenda with a new, promising spirit. We saw a similar spirit "on the ground" with their at least partial cooperation to make the Turkish-led "Egemen" naval exercise several months ago. On the other hand, the Turks have apparently/apparently increased overflights of the two islands, and the Turks per Apakan are introducing their status into the mix of issues. Greeks meanwhile are raising with us Turkish actions in apocalyptic terms while continuing the talks with the Turks as well as continuing a host of high level contacts.

We will continue to press this issue, and are now certain that Erdogan will be briefed and ready to discuss this and other Aegean issues during his trip to Athens.

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JEFFREY